Editorial: Responsible Well-Being — A Personal Agenda for Development

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Summary. — If development means good change, questions arise about what is good, and what sorts of change matter. Answers can be personally defined and redefined. The changing words, meanings and concepts of development discourse both reflect and influence what is done. The realities of the powerful tend to dominate. Drawing on experience with participatory approaches and methods which enable poor and marginalized people to express their realities, responsible well-being is proposed as a central concept for a development agenda. This links with capabilities and livelihoods, and is based on equity and sustainability as principles. The primacy of personal actions and non-actions in development points to the need for a pedagogy for the non-oppressed. This includes self-critical awareness, thinking through the effects of actions, and enabling those with power and wealth to experience being better off with less. Others are invited and encouraged to reflect, improve on this analysis, and write their own agenda.

Key words — development vocabulary, ethics, methods, participation, poverty, well-being

It is not that we should simply seek new and better ways for managing society, the economy and the world. The point is that we should fundamentally change how we behave (Havel, 1992).

What we need is an impassioned, intellectually honest, and, above all, open ended debate about how each person should best conduct his or her life (Forsyth, 1991, p. 269).

1. INTRODUCTION

To write about a development agenda is rash and perhaps arrogant. There are multiple realities ecological, economic, social, political, and personal. Change accelerates and uncontrolled global forces make prediction ever harder. Any development agenda is value-laden, and some academics abhor anything that smacks of moralizing. Yet not to ask questions about values is value-laden by default, and not to consider good things to do is a tacit surrender to professional conditioning, personal reflexes, and fatalism. Perhaps the right course is for each of us to reflect, articulate and share our own ideas about values, problems, potentials and priorities, accepting these as provisional and fallible. Paraphrasing Heraclitus, we can then recognize that concerning what we think and what we should do, nothing will be permanent but change. Right behavior then includes trying to understand ourselves and changing what we do. Doubt, self-awareness and embracing error are virtues. This means that while thinking and acting we also question how we think, what we think, and the rightness of what we do. It is in that tentative and self-doubting spirit that this editorial is written.

2. WHAT IS DEVELOPMENT?

The eternal challenge of development is to do better. Usually this is tackled by identifying policies, programs and projects. Both the Human Development Report 1997 (UNDP, 1997) and the World Development Report 1997 (World Bank, 1997) follow in a long tradition by listing policies and actions to make the world a better place, especially for the poor. The argument of this editorial is that this does not go far enough. There is a crucial missing link. We need to add the personal dimension. This implies stepping back and engaging in critical self-examination. To do better, we have to examine not just the normally defined agenda of development "out there," but ourselves, how our

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ideas are formed, how we think, how we change, and what we do and do not do.

Words are a starting point. Fritjof Capra (1996, p. 282) has put it that:

The uniqueness of being human lies in our ability to continually weave the linguistic network in which we are embedded. To be human is to exist in language. In language we coordinate our behaviour, and together in language we bring forth our world.

For professionals committed to development, the world we wish to bring forth is linked to what we mean by development.

On the cover of The Development Dictionary (Sachs, 1992), a sentence by Wolfgang Sachs proclaims, “The idea of Development stands today like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Its shadow obscures our vision.” In an editorial in the Forest Trees and People Newsletter (1995, pp. 26-27) Daphne Thuresson has written “As the existing system crumbles around us, new and exciting alternatives are sprouting up in the rubble.”

Sachs’s pessimism and Thuresson’s optimism are both needed. The record of “development” is mixed. Those who damn the errors, failures and deficits tend to ignore the counterfactual, how much worse things could have been if nothing had been done. Those who laud achievements and successes tend to overlook how much better things might have been even than they were. A balanced view has to recognise renewals and continuities in the landscape as well as ruins and rubble, and older trees as well as new sprouts.

To explore the terrain, let us start, as The Development Dictionary does, by examining words and concepts that are common currency in contemporary development discourse and with which we seek to “bring forth our world.”

Development has been taken to mean different things at different times, in different places, and by different people in different professions and organizations. The dominant meanings have been those attributed by economists and used in economics. Development has thus often been equated with economic development, and economic development in turn with economic growth, often abbreviated simply to growth. But the meanings given to development have also evolved, not least through the concept of human development in the Human Development Reports of UNDP. In all cases, though, however clinical the analysis or disparate the definitions, the word seems to have had two aspects: it has been normative; and it has involved change. So the underlying meaning of development has been good change. That is the sense in which it is used here. Views have differed, and perhaps always should and will differ, about what is good and what sorts of change are significant.

Change is continuous in what changes and how it changes, and in what we see as good. All this is reflected in words and meanings. These are both formative and adaptive: they both influence and express conditions, ideologies, perceptions, practices and priorities. That vocabularies and meanings evolve is then itself necessary and good, and both cause and effect of other changes.

3. A CHANGING VOCABULARY

So it has been that new words have been continuously introduced and spread. Additions to the common lexicon of development in the past two decades have been prolific. New words have been added faster than old have fallen into disuse. Some such as integrated, coordinated, planning and socialism have peaked and passed into decline. Others in the eclectic and perhaps ephemeral language of post-modernism, such as deconstruction, narrative and meta-narrative, text and subtext, have largely languished in academic and literary backwaters. Others, such as equity and poverty, have been robust and resilient. Yet others, some old, some new, which have come close to the mainstream of much development discourse during the past two decades include:

accountability, capabilities, civil society, consumer, decentralisation, democracy, deprivation, diversity, empowerment, entitlement, environment, gender, globalization, governance, human rights, livelihood, market, ownership, participation, partnership, pluralism, process, stakeholder, sustainability, transparency, vulnerability, well-being.

Of these only three — environment, market and participation — receive chapters in The Development Dictionary.

4. THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

The power of vocabulary to change how we think and what we do is easy to underestimate. It influences the course of development in many ways: through changing the agenda; through modifying mindsets; through legitimating new actions; and through stimulating and focusing research and learning.

New language is easily dismissed as rhetoric or jargon. Seasoned skeptics can see changes in words and meanings as transient, superficial, and insignificant. Those impelled by authority or prudence to use new words signal their cynicism by dubbing them “buzz words,” “flavour of the month,” and “politically correct.” So consultants, bureaucrats, and those
seeking contracts, support, security or promotion, tap out and parrot the latest vocabulary.

Language is, however, about much more than rhetoric and opportunism. It shapes and interacts with the ways we think and behave. An obvious case is gender syntax. Reversing “he or she” to “she or he,” or using “she” as the pronoun for “the African farmer,” have not come easily to many, but their capacity to challenge and shock, and their gradual acceptance, have been a small but significant bridgehead into male-biased thinking and patriarchy. So in our development context, we can see that language has helped to bring forth and change the world of development professionals. This has happened in three ways: introducing, stressing and defining words; combining them in new ways; and listing and disaggregating.

(a) Introducing, stressing and defining words

How the thinking and actions of development professionals may have been affected over the past two decades can be assessed by reflecting on the contexts of the words listed above. Table 1 shows how they can be separated.

A personal impression is that 20 years ago none of these, except equity and poverty, was as prominent as today. Increasingly, these words are embedded in the mindsets of development professionals, and increasingly used by them unreflectively, that is to say, without forcing, and without feeling insecure or self-conscious or a need to justify or explain their use. In this process they change how development realities are constructed and seen. An example is the new and specialized meanings of capabilities and of entitlements as progressively elaborated by Amartya Sen (1981, 1985). New words can also confront old. Livelihood has been put forward as a challenge to the reductionism and specificity of employment. Deprivation has been put forward as a challenge to the narrowness of poverty.

(b) Combining words

Combinations of words have been influential in three ways.

First, they have been used to focus and present radical concepts in a technical guise. Primary stakeholders as proposed in the World Bank,4 is a technical phrase which implies a priority for poor people affected positively or negatively by a policy, project or program. The term was widely welcomed and applauded but reportedly had to be put in cold storage by the Bank because of political pressures from governments in the South. But by then it had escaped and had a life of its own. Social development was not much used 20 years ago, but now there are many social development advisers, and the Social Development Summit was held in Copenhagen in 1995.

Second, combining words can expand disciplinary views and provide bridges between disciplines. Put negatively “Like blinkers, the terms we adopt to express ourselves limit the range of our view” (Capra, 1996, p. 268). Put positively, we can expand and alter our view and what we do by combining terms. This can be illustrated by the shift in priorities and thinking has been taking place from things and infrastructure to people and capabilities. As the importance of people has risen in the development agenda, the practical question has been how to help the professions, notably engineering and economics, that have dominated donor agencies especially the World Bank, to accommodate the new priorities. The transition has been eased linguistically by applying to people the familiar language and concepts of things and numbers. So we have learned to speak of human capital, human infrastructure, human resource development, social infrastructure, social investment, and now social capital. On the negative side, these may standardize, depersonalize, and miss much that matters to people, and may purport to measure what cannot meaningfully be measured. On the positive side, they make it easier for economists to incorporate people and social institutions in their mental and mathematical models.

Third, combinations of words can be formative, starting largely undefined and presenting a challenge and opportunity to provide a meaning, as this editorial does below with responsible well-being. Sustainable livelihoods was embodied in the title of a conference (Conroy and Litvinoff, 1988), caught on as a phrase, and then was progressively explored and elaborated for meanings of sustainable, of livelihood,

Table 1. Development vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The human condition</th>
<th>capabilities, deprivation, entitlement, livelihood, poverty, vulnerability, well-being</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization, power, and relationships</td>
<td>accountability, consumer, decentralisation, empowerment, ownership, participation, partnership, process, stakeholder, transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domains, dimensions</td>
<td>civil society, environment, globalization, governance, market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>democracy, diversity, equity, gender, human rights, pluralism, sustainability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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and of the two words taken together (e.g., Chambers and Conway, 1992; Bernstein et al., 1992). Social exclusion opens up a new perspective on deprivation. Most recently, state capability (World Bank, 1997, passim) draws attention to what a state can and should do in relation to its ability to act.

(c) Listing and disaggregating

Listing and disaggregating are means of qualifying the reductionism of much development thinking. Listing adds diversity and complexity. Disaggregating unpacks concepts. Thus the reductionism of poverty defined for professional convenience by a single measure of income or consumption has been qualified in three ways: by listing and examining other dimensions of deprivation, such as vulnerability, physical weakness, powerlessness, discrimination, humiliation and social exclusion; by separating out aspects of poverty itself, and using the terms income-poverty (as in UNDP, 1997, passim) or consumption-poverty for that subset which is normally measured and used for comparisons; and by enabling poor people themselves to use their own words and concepts to express, list and analyze their realities, local, complex, diverse, dynamic and uncontrollable as they so often are (Chambers, 1997, Chapter 8).

5. WHOSE LANGUAGE COUNTS?

If vocabulary can make so much difference, we must ask: who changes the words we use? Whose language brings forth our world and guides our actions? Who defines what words mean?

The world brought forth is usually constructed by the powerful in central places or by those well placed to influence them. The words and concepts of development both express and form the mindsets, and values of dominant linguistic groups, disciplines and professions, and organizations. Among linguistic groups, the English language is, irreversibly it seems, the most influential. Other transnational languages such as Arabic, Chinese, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish — can dominate national and other vernaculars. Among disciplines and professions, the words and concepts of engineering preoccupied with things, and applied economics preoccupied with quantification, still set the agenda and vocabulary of much development discourse. The procedures which fit and reinforce their paradigms, such as the logical framework and social cost-benefit analysis, are authoritative taught and required. Among organizations, those clustered in the Eastern United States are pervasively influential, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with the greatest concentration of development professionals, power and intellectual capability in the world; UNDP increasingly through the Human Development Report; and the US government. These are major sources of new vocabulary and ideas which gain currency. The President of the World Bank, in particular, exercises enormous power over development thinking and action through the words he, or his speechwriters, choose to use. Robert McNamara’s 1973 Nairobi speech on poverty is an example, followed now by James Wolfensohn’s promotion of participation.

6. PERSONAL VALUES AND CONCEPTS

All, though, need not be determined by the powerful, from the central cores and from above. Richard Forsyth (1991) has presented a challenge for each person to devise her or his own religion. Similarly, development professionals, in a spirit of self-doubting pluralism, can help one another by drawing up and sharing personal lists and patterns of values and concepts, and seeing where and how these differ and cohere. There is space here for reflection on how one’s personal realities and values have been formed, and to choose, change and give meaning to a personal list of words and concepts. There is scope here too to give priority to the values and preferences of the weak.

For all development professionals, there are many sources of values, vision and concepts. The great religions will always be sources of inspiration to explore for values and vision. For analytical concepts and insights there are now numerous new sources. The theories of chaos, edge of chaos and complexity (Gleick, 1988; Resnick, 1994, Waldrop, 1994) contribute insights and analogies: how complex self-organizing systems can be based on few rules, with parallels in decentralized, democratic and diverse human organization; how small actions at certain times can have huge effects later, pointing to the power of individual choice and responsibility; and how there can be zones of stability in turbulence, suggesting reassertions of continuities even in chaotic conditions. The new ecology contributes understandings of local heterogeneity, networks, dynamism, sequences, transitions and synergies, with continuous change and adaptation: in Capra’s (1996, p. 295) words some of the basic principles are “interdependence, recycling, partnership, flexibility, diversity and, as a consequence of all those, sustainability.” Other sources include soft systems theory (Checkland, 1981) and management theory and practice (e.g. Peters, 1989; Senge, 1990; Handy, 1990). Sources such as these present vocabularies, concepts and ways of thinking to be tapped and more can be expected.
Another source is the experience with PRA (participatory rural appraisal). This has influenced my own view. Others will judge for themselves whether for them too it may help. PRA is a family of continuously evolving approaches, methods, values and behaviors which has turned much that is conventional on its head. It seeks to enable local and marginalized people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate. In its philosophy, practice and vocabulary it has come to stress

— the question “whose reality counts?” raising issues of equity and empowerment, and of enabling women, poor people and others who are marginalized to express their realities and make them count
— the primacy of the personal, especially behavior and attitudes, and exercising personal judgement and responsibility.

Let us examine these in turn.

7. WHOSE REALITY COUNTS?

In our world of global communication, those who are connected electronically are a new exclusive elite. Those who are not connected to Internet, e-mail and fax are a new group of the excluded. At the same time, the realities of professionals and of poor people are notoriously disparate. Again and again the realities of those who are poor and marginalized are ignored or misread. The challenge is how to give voice to those who are left out and to make their reality count.

Participatory methodologies, perhaps most notably PRA, have shown both power and popularity in enabling those who are subordinate to express their realities. Participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) using PRA approaches and methods have been pioneered in Ghana (Norton et al., 1995; Dogbe, forthcoming), Zambia (Norton et al., 1994; Norton and Owen 1996), South Africa (Attwood, 1996; May, 1996; Murphy, 1995; Teixeira and Chambers, 1995), and most recently in Bangladesh (UNDP, 1996), using a variety of processes (for reviews see Norton and Stephens, 1995; Robb, forthcoming; Chambers and Blackburn, 1996; Holland with Blackburn, forthcoming; Norton, forthcoming).

Insights and priorities have included, for example, the importance of all-weather roads for access to medical treatment and markets during the rains, the need to reschedule the timing of school fees away from the most difficult time of year, and training health staff to be friendly and respectful to poor people seeking treatment. In Bangladesh, where the focus of analysis by poor people was on “doables,” differences in priorities between women and men, and between urban and rural, were highlighted (UNDP, 1996). The first doable priority of urban women was drinking water, and the second private places for washing. A widespread desire of poor people was enforcement of the anti-dowry laws. Elsewhere, a better understanding of sectoral priorities, for example between health and education, has also resulted. The thematic investigations using PRA approaches and methods have also illuminated local realities in a range of contexts, for example:

— area stigma — how living in an area with a bad reputation for violence makes it difficult to get jobs (from Jamaica — Moser and Holland, 1995; Levy, 1996);
— how a quarter of girls of school age were “invisible” to the official system (from The Gambia — Kane et al., 1996);
— how the problems and priorities of women differ not only from those of men but also between women depending on their access to basic services and infrastructures, and their social background (from Morocco — Shah and Bourarach, 1995);
— how an official belief that indigenous tenure systems no longer existed was wrong, and how diverse and crucial they were (from Guinea — Freudenberger, forthcoming);
— the ability of local people to define sustainable management and conservation practices for themselves (from India and Pakistan — Gujja et al., forthcoming).

Strikingly, through PRA processes local people have again and again presented values and preferences which differ from those of outsiders or those supposed for local people by outsiders. When asked to card sort households in what was originally wealth ranking (Grandin, 1988) local people have so consistently sorted not by wealth but by some composite concept close to well-being, that the process has been renamed well-being ranking. In well-being, income has often had a surprisingly low priority compared with health, family life, respect and social values.7 Empirically, well-being and its close equivalents seem to express a widespread human value open to diverse local and individual definitions.

PPAs and PRA approaches and methods are not panaceas. They do, though, present new opportunities for policy influence on behalf of those normally excluded. They can bring poor people and policy-makers together in new ways. They can present realities in visual diagrams with a new credibility. To the question “Whose Voice Counts?” they have shown that the answer can be, more than before, the voices of those previously unheard.
8. PERSONAL BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES

The experience of PRA has been expressed in, or leads to, words and concepts which have not been prominent in mainstream development thinking. Some of these are:

commitment, disempowerment, doubt, fulfillment, fun, generosity, responsibility, self-critical awareness, sharing, and trust

These have had little place in the headlines of the literature of development. None features as a chapter heading in the Development Dictionary (Sachs, 1992).

In addition, PRA has adopted and evolved a number of injunctions:

- ask them
- be nice to people
- don’t rush
- embrace error
- facilitate
- hand over the stick
- have fun
- relax
- they can do it (i.e. have confidence that people are capable)

Strikingly, these words, phrases and injunctions point to personal behavior and attitudes. The three original pillars of PRA (Mascarenhas et al., 1991) were:

- methods (many involving visualizations through diagramming, mapping, scoring and so on)
- sharing
- behavior and attitudes

There is a growing consensus that of these by far the most important is behavior and attitudes (see, e.g., Absalom et al., 1995; Kumar, 1996; Blackburn with Holland, forthcoming). Yet these have been absent from most professional training and from most agendas of development. Taken together with the one sentence manual “Use your own best judgement at all times,” the experience and ethics of PRA stress not just personal behavior and attitudes, but personal responsibility.

9. RESPONSIBLE WELL-BEING

The two themes generated by the PRA experience — locally defined concepts of well-being, and personal responsibility — can be combined as responsible well-being, a two-word concept to explore. The challenge is to see what this might mean for all people, in their relations with themselves, with others, and with the environment. Two basic principles on which there is wide agreement are equity and sustainability. Two elements which are both ends and means in development thinking are livelihood and capabilities. These can be linked with each other as in Figure 1.

The overarching end is well-being, supported by capabilities and livelihood. Equity and sustainability as principles qualify livelihood to become livelihood security, and well-being to become responsible well-being.

Each word can be presented in a statement:

- The objective of development is well-being for all. Well-being can be described as the experience of good quality of life. Well-being and its opposite, ill-being, differ from wealth and poverty. Well-being and ill-being are words with equivalents in many languages. Unlike wealth, well-being is open to the whole range of human experience, social, psychological and spiritual as well as material. It has many elements. Each person can define it for herself or himself. Perhaps most people would agree to including living standards, access to basic services, security and freedom from fear, health, good relations with others, friendship, love, peace of mind, choice, creativity, fulfillment and fun. Extreme poverty and ill-being go together, but the link between wealth and well-being is weak or even negative: reducing poverty usually diminishes ill-being; amassing wealth does not assure well-being and may diminish it.

- Livelihood security is basic to well-being. Livelihood can be defined as adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs and to support well-being. Security refers to secure rights, physical safety and reliable access to resources, food and income, and basic services. It includes tangible and intangible assets to offset time, ease shocks and meet contingencies. Sustainable livelihoods maintain or enhance resource productivity on a long-term basis and equitable livelihoods maintain or enhance the livelihoods and well-being of others.

- Capabilities are means to livelihood and well-being. Capabilities refers to what people are capable of doing and being. They are means to livelihood and fulfilment; and their enlargement through learning, practice, training and education are means to better living and to well-being.

- Equity: the poor, weak, vulnerable and exploited should come first. Equity qualifies all initiatives in development. Equity includes human rights, intergenerational and gender equity, and the reversals of putting the last first and the first last, to be considered in all contexts. The reversals are not absolute, but to balance and level.

- Sustainability: to be good, conditions and change must be sustainable — economically, socially, institutionally, and environmentally. Sustainability means that long-term perspectives should apply to all policies and actions, with
EDITORIAL

sustainable well-being and sustainable livelihoods as objectives for present and future generations.

When well-being is qualified by equity and sustainability it becomes responsible well-being, as the overarching end, to which all else is means. Well-being is then not at the cost of equity and sustainability, but is enhanced when it contributes to them. Responsible well-being recognizes obligations to others, both those alive and future generations, and to their quality of life. In general, the word "responsible" has moral force in proportion to wealth and power: the wealthier and more powerful people are, the greater the actual or potential impact of their actions or inactions, and so the greater the scope and need for their well-being to be responsible. Responsible well-being refers thus to doing as well as being; it is "by" as well as "for". The objective of development then becomes responsible well-being by all and for all.

10. THE PRIMACY OF THE PERSONAL

Because the responsible of responsible well-being applies to all human beings, it points to the personal dimension.

The neglect of the personal dimension in development at first sight seems bizarre. It is self-evident to the point of embarrassment that most of what happens is the result of what sort of people we are, how we perceive realities, and what we do and do not do. Whether change is good or bad is largely determined by personal actions, whether by political leaders, officials, professionals or local people, by international currency speculators, executives of transnational corporations, non-government organization (NGO) workers, or researchers, by mothers, fathers or children, or by soldiers, secret agents, journalists, lawyers, police, or protesters. Especially, what happens depends on those who are powerful and wealthy. One might have supposed then that trying to understand and change their perceptions, motivations and behaviors would have been at the center of development and development studies, and a major concern for the IMF, the World Bank, other donor agencies, governments and NGOs. Yet there have been few studies of individual officials as leaders. There are quite a number of institutes devoted to development studies but there is, to my knowledge, no institute devoted to the study of greed or power.

Part of the neglect stems from academic culture with its anathema of evangelism, its value of objectivity, and its search for general rather than individual explanations. More potently, perhaps, the neglect is a defence. It can disturb profoundly to reflect on what one does and does not do. It embarrasses to be confronted by poverty and suffering compared with one's own condition. When a poor farmer in India asked me my income I could not reply. To put the personal to the fore in this editorial is to expose my own hypocrisy,
and to make it difficult to continue. But hypocrisy is no excuse for silence.

The enormity of this missing link is illustrated by the most recent Human Development and World Development Reports (UNDP, 1997; World Bank, 1997). The Human Development Report 1997 is concerned with poverty. It recommends six essential actions — empowering individuals, households and communities; strengthening gender equality; accelerating pro-poor growth; improving the management of globalization; ensuring an active state; and taking special actions for special situations. All of these require action by those who are powerful and relatively wealthy. For its part, the World Development Report 1997 is devoted to the State in a Changing World. It presents many recommendations for action. In recognizing the importance of leadership and vision (e.g., pp. 14, 123, 154–155, 166), noting political constraints and vested interests, and lamenting the "unbridled pursuit of riches or power" (p. 159) it gets closer to the personal. But it does not go the whole way. It does not come to terms with the need for personal change. Where the moving force is to come from is not clear. Incentives are recommended, but the question remains who determines and pushes through the incentives. Neither report confronts the personal dimension.

In contrast, the concept of responsible well-being puts the personal in the center. Responsible well-being is an individual condition. The major issue is how to encourage and enable the powerful and wealthy accept this ideal, or something close to it, and to define it for themselves in ways which make things better for those who are weak and poor.

11. A PEDAGOGY FOR THE NON-OPPRESSED

For responsible well-being, it is then especially individuals who are powerful and wealthy who have to change. This entails confronting and transforming abuses of power and wealth. For this, one need is for a pedagogy for the non-oppressed (including ourselves, the sort of people who read World Development), to enable us to think and act differently. There are many disparate domains for analysis and action, among them: how we treat and bring up children; how to achieve reconciliation after conflict; how donor agency staff behave on mission (as noted by Taylor, 1997, pp. 151–152 in an earlier editorial); how to rehabilitate those who have suffered a PhD. Besides these and others, and relating directly to responsible well-being, three areas stand out for methodological innovation and application:

(a) How to facilitate personal change and self-critical epistemological awareness

Methodologies exist, and more are needed, to facilitate personal awareness, including epistemological awareness, meaning being self-critically aware of how we learn and mislearn and how we construct our realities. It is difficult to exaggerate the central importance of this subject. The degree to which economists have been found to disagree (see, e.g., Frey et al., 1984, pp. 986–989) is, to a non-economist, alarming when they exercise so much power. It is also striking how dramatically their dominant views change, as illustrated in Hans Singer’s (Singer, 1997) earlier editorial on “The Golden Age of the Keynesian Consensus — The Pendulum Swings Back.” Part of the way to resolve differences between economists, and to enable them to be more in touch and less wrong, is through self-aware introspection; it is through reflection to understand how their views, like those of others, have been formed, and to be open to doubt and embracing error.

Similarly, reflection and awareness of interpersonal behavior and power relations is critical. On the behavior and perceptions of donor staff on mission and of host government staff who deal with them, depends the well-being of millions of poor people. Because of their power, such missions are vulnerable to being misled. Yet to my knowledge they have never been studied or documented beyond the level of personal anecdote.

The implication is programs for self-critical awareness, and attitude and behavior change, which in turn have implications for bureaucratic recruitment, procedures, incentives and cultures. The World Bank under the leadership of James Wolfensohn, is attempting to grasp this nettle. Senior staff are not only to receive exposure to management practices in institutions such as Harvard, but are also to have a week of immersion in a village or slum. This may seem a small innovation. It is, though, a major departure from past practice, and if it lasts and spreads, may prove a defining watershed of change.

(b) How to enable those with power and wealth to think through and recognize the effects of their actions and non-actions

The truism of “out of sight, out of mind” has awesome implications for those with power to make a difference. A little reflection on causal chains will suggest that a decision in a meeting in Washington to hold a poor African country to debt repayments will kill children; but those who make the decision will never see this, and never be called to account. Indeed, they deserve sympathy and understanding.
for the responsibility they shoulder, though those they harm deserve an altogether different level of compassion.

A mechanism is needed for such meetings, and for individual decisions and actions, for thinking through the implications. Lessons could be learned from therapeutic jurisprudence where attempts are made to identify the effects of proposed laws. With development decisions two advocates could be appointed to argue, one on behalf of women, children, the poor and the excluded, and one on behalf of future generations, in each case analyzing and presenting likely effects of alternatives. The causal and linkage diagramming which has proved effective in PRA could be part of the analysis.

Many of the key decisions that affect the poor are made by those who work for transnational corporations. Nothing said here should weaken the normal means of trying to influence them, through ethical investments and consumption, through organized pressure and through governments. But in addition, they too can be invited to define responsible well-being for themselves; they too are human and capable of good actions. At the launch of the Human Development Report 1997, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oscar Arias asked whether aerospace executives who sold arms to countries with bad human rights records would read the diaries of those in prison. Perhaps those executives should be invited and encouraged, again and again, to read those diaries, and to analyze, in a participatory way, the causal links between their arms sales and the repression and imprisonment of others. Perhaps all of us could and should do the same for our actions and inactions, using visual diagramming as a tool. Perhaps companies should be shamed who do not include advocates of the poor and of future generations in their deliberations. If some would show leadership in these directions, others might follow.

(c) How to enable those with more wealth and power to welcome having less

For well-being to be responsible, in a sustainable global eco-social system, those with more have to accept having less. This applies to both wealth and power. The biggest challenge for development as good change in the long term, is to find more ways in which those with more wealth and power will not just accept having less, but will welcome it as a means to well-being, to a better quality of life.

Much normal thinking about wealth and power is zero-sum. In this thinking, for those with less to gain, those with more must have less, and so lose. If all are assumed to be selfish, zero-sum conflict can appear inevitable. But as Norman Uphoff (1992) has argued, there is scope for positive sum thinking and action. In conflict resolution there are often gains for all. Generosity brings its own non-material rewards. Empowering others can be deeply satisfying. The PRA experience of changing dominating behavior, sitting down, handing over the stick, and enabling others to conduct their own analysis and explore their own realities, has often been a source of excitement, fun, fulfillment and learning for all those concerned. The needs and opportunities here have barely begun to be recognised. The methodological challenge is to find more ways for reversing the normal view: for those with wealth and power to find and feel themselves better off with less; for having less in material terms to be experienced as a gain; and for disempowering oneself to empower others to be experienced as positive.

12. CONCLUSION

In a context of accelerating change, words and concepts will continue to succeed one another. The question is whether in the volatile and transient vocabulary of development, some stable continuity of core concepts, continuously redefined, can or should be sought. An analogy from chaos theory is a strange attractor, a pattern continuously reaffirmed in turbulence, like the Red Spot on Jupiter. The same words or concepts might then be used, in the same relations with each other, as in the web of responsible well-being, while being constantly reexamined and redefined both collectively and individually.

Responsible well-being, interlinked with capabilities and livelihood, and with foundations in principles of equity and sustainability, is simply one set of concepts inviting exploration. Whether it can serve a common purpose others can judge. Whether concepts such as these can go further and be drivers for good change is for trial. In the spirit of the one sentence manual adopted in PRA — “Use your own best judgement at all times” — each development professional can critically reflect, and draw up and use a personal list of ends and means. Perhaps what we should seek, then, is not consensus but pluralism, not a conclusion but a process, and not permanence but change in evolving concepts. For that we need an ethic of action, self-critical reflection, search and sharing.

In that spirit, let me conclude by inviting and encouraging others to reflect, to think out their own concepts and definitions, and to write and share their own editorials, improving on what has been presented here.
1. For a classical and entertaining discussion of the need for the interaction of both poles of a range of development dichotomies, see Streeten (1983).

2. See e.g., Forty Years in Development: The Search for Social Justice (1997), Development 40(1) for a useful overview.

3. Or, to change the zoological metaphor

   Consultants with contracts to win
   use language they know to be in
   Chameleons, they
   fake a fashion display
   camouflaging for cash is no sin

4. The term "primary stakeholders," defined as "those expected to benefit from or be adversely affected by Bank-supported operations, particularly the poor and marginalized" had a checkered history. It was included in early drafts of The World Bank and Participation: Report to the Learning Group on Participatory Development, and applauded by many Bank-watchers. But it was dropped from the final version (World Bank, 1994), reportedly because some Bank Directors from countries of the South objected that it constituted interference with internal political affairs.

5. All Presidents of the World Bank so far have been men.


7. For fuller presentations of the evidence about wealth and well-being as criteria see RRA Notes, No. 15 and Chambers (1997), pp. 176–179.

8. In this list, fun is an apple among oranges. The other words are serious and moral. Fun looks frivolous. That fun is out of reach for so many — the desperately sick, suffering and poor, those who are abused, trapped, victims of violence, those fleeing in terror from war — may make it seem obscene in a development vocabulary. But it is as important as the others. With play and fun come creativity, laughter, the breakdown of barriers, the expression of realities, new insights, and the weakening of defences and of structures of power. That it is out of reach for so many is an outrage.

9. In an earlier draft I used altruism. But altruism is an austere, unsmiling word with overtones of "do-gooding." I am grateful to Normal Uphoff (1992, p. 341) for pointing out that altruism and generosity can be used interchangeably. His chapter 12 is exciting and essential reading on this.

10. There is, however, a chapter by Marianne Gronemeyer on "Helping" which is close to altruism or generosity. But the chapter has a negative orientation. Gronemeyer analyzes the modernizing of the idea of help. Help, she argues, has evolved from spontaneous response to a cry of need to an instrument for the sophisticated exercise of power, in which neediness is determined not by the cry of the afflicted but by the diagnosis of the development establishment.

11. Parts of the text of this section are derived from Chambers (1997, Chapter 1), with minor modifications.

12. For further discussion of livelihoods, including sustainable livelihoods, see Chambers (1987), Conroy and Litvinoff (1988), Bernstein et al. (1992), Chambers and Conway (1992), and Davies (1996).


14. One study (Frank et al., 1993) found alarmingly that economists were more likely than non-economists to act in a non-trusting, non-cooperative, self-interested manner. The median gift to big charities by economists among 1245 randomly selected college professors was substantially lower than for non-economists; and about 9% of economists gave nothing, as against a range of 1 to 4% for other disciplines. In a prisoners' dilemma game economics students defected 60% of the time compared with 39% for non-economists.

15. A sharper antithesis to Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970) would be "pedagogy for the oppressors," but this would unnecessarily alienate some, and not apply to others who might also benefit from a pedagogy for the non-oppressed.

REFERENCES


